North Dakota Joint Information Center
News Release

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BURGUM APPLAUDS CAMP CLEANUP EFFORT; SECURITY WIRE TO BE REMOVED FROM BACKWATER BRIDGE IN STAGES

BISMARCK, N.D. – Gov. Doug Burgum on Monday applauded a coordinated effort to clean up the Dakota Access Pipeline protest camps as an important step toward addressing the safety and environmental risks posed by imminent flooding.

Contractors hired by the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe began cleaning up the main camp Monday in coordination with camp headsmen, who discussed the plan with tribal officials and representatives from the governor's office and state agencies Sunday night at Prairie Knights Casino.

"It is paramount for public safety, and to prevent an environmental disaster, that the camps be cleared prior to a potential spring flood," Burgum said. "Once the floodwaters recede, the land will need to be cleaned and eventually restored to pre-protest conditions."

Hans Youngbird Bradley, brownfields coordinator for the tribe's environmental protection agency, said crews with heavy equipment began removing abandoned sections of the main camp, which is located on land managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers near the confluence of the Cannonball and Missouri rivers.

"We're not trying to forcefully remove anybody," Bradley said. "We're just there to clean up the abandoned camps."

Camp headsmen and other camp representatives said those staying in the main Oceti Sakowin Camp north of the Cannonball River and the Rosebud Camp south of the river have begun cleanup efforts. An Army Corps of Engineers representative indicated the agency is prepared to hire contractors to complete the cleanup after the camps are vacated.

The Morton County Sheriff's Department will consider removing security wire and jersey barriers in stages from the barricade on the north side of the Backwater Bridge later this week if positive progress toward clearing the camp continues and protesters do not engage in any criminal activity. This decision comes after ongoing talks between the state, Morton County and the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe to find a way forward to clear the camps prior to potential spring flooding, ease tensions surrounding the pipeline protests, and potentially re-open State Highway 1806 in a conditions-based, phased approach.

The plan to remove the security wire shows good faith by the state and Morton County in helping start the process of returning southern Morton County to normalcy. The reestablishment of rule of law is the key condition.

“The safety of all those living and involved in the area, especially the residents of Morton County, is still my top priority,” Morton County Sheriff Kyle Kirchmeier said. “Although this is a step in the right direction, Highway 1806 will not be completely re-opened until rule of law in the area is restored.”

To assist in the cleanup of the camps, the Army Corps of Engineers lifted a cease-and-desist order against a company contracted by the camp for cleanup efforts.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) has dispatched an additional 20 police officers to North Dakota to assist state and local law enforcement near the protest sites, bringing the total number of BIA officers in the area to 40.

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